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SOLD BY R. C. HARDWICK, HOPKINSVILLE, KY

The Cat or the Comet

WHAT was that? A confused noise, as of shattering glass, a heavy fall, and then a pistol shot, all at once. Then Aunt Samyra rapped on the door and called to me in excited tones through the keyhole—

"Alicia Dean! Alicia Dean! Get up and dress, quick! There are burglars upstairs!"

Fortunately I was already dressed, having sat up later than usual that night, waiting for my roommate, Susan Ellen, to come back from the concert.

So I opened the door at once, and as I did so Susan Ellen almost ran into my arms, looking white and scared and almost ready to drop.

Aunt Samyra appeared a moment later, her hair done up in curl papers, armed with a lighted candle, a revolver and a poker.

I got possession of the revolver immediately; not that I expected to do any more good with it than she could, but I hoped to do less harm.

"Susan Ellen," said I, in a stage whisper, "did you see anything of the robbers as you came in?"

But Susan Ellen seemed so paralyzed with fear that she was incapable of answering, and simply clung to my left arm like a frightened child, shaking from head to foot.

"Now, girls, follow me, and don't speak a word!" commanded Aunt Samyra, ascending the stairway, protected by her helmet of curl-papers, as it were, and with the candle in one hand and the poker in the other.

We followed at a safe distance, and I confided to Susan Ellen on the way that the pistol shot seemed to have come from Uncle Ralph's room, and I was afraid the robbers had hurt him, or he would have come to our rescue in this time.

She opened her mouth to answer, but her teeth chattered so that she could not.

We now saw that Aunt Samyra had stepped in front of Uncle Ralph's door and was making ineffectual attempts to rouse him.

By accident I had the key of my room in my hand, having unconsciously taken it out after opening the door to Aunt Samyra. This key I now applied to Uncle Ralph's lock. The door opened readily, and Aunt Samyra stepped in, but sprang back instantly with a cry of horror, for Uncle Ralph lay on the floor under the window, with a pistol beside him.

It did not take me many minutes to decide that he was dead, with a bullet through his heart.

After becoming convinced of that fact, all my nerves left me. While gazing vacantly about with dazed eyes, vaguely conscious that Aunt Samyra was sobbing, and that the cook, who had just come on the scene, was uttering horrified ejaculations, I felt some one pull my sleeve. It was Susan Ellen.

"Take me away," she said, "it's chilly up here."

"It is chilly," I answered, drawing her arm through mine.

Then I noticed that a strong gale was sweeping through the room, and that the upper sash of the window was out.

"Look!" I said. No wonder we are cold!"

But she paid no attention. After I had put Susan Ellen to bed and managed to get her warm and quiet with the assistance of smelling salts and a glass of wine, I went back upstairs.

I had already decided in my own mind that Uncle Ralph had been murdered by a burglar, but the first glance round the room seemed to disprove this theory, for on the dressing case lay the watch and the purse of the murdered man. Nor, after thorough search, could I find even a pin missing.

Of course we had a coroner's inquest, and this developed the fact, which we already knew, that "Ralph" Morton had met his death at the hands of a party or parties unknown.

When the verdict had been rendered I returned to the scene of the murder and made another investigation. Under the window I discovered some bits of broken glass. On examining the window itself I not only found that the upper sash was out, but that one pane of glass in the lower was missing. As I failed to draw any conclusion from these circumstances, I went back to Susan Ellen and asked if she supposed the murderer had carried off the upper window sash.

She burst out crying hysterically, and for a long time I could get no answer out of her at all. But it transpired, at last, that when Aunt Samyra had been apprised of Uncle Ralph's unexpected visit the day before she had sent Susan Ellen upstairs to get his room ready. Susan Ellen, thinking she had plenty of time before his arrival to clean the windows, took out the sashes—they were old-fashioned windows—in order to wash them.

But Uncle Ralph got in two hours ahead of time, having come on an earlier train than he expected. The result was that Susan Ellen had not finished the windows.

"But it was so warm," she would say with another burst of tears, "I did not think it would matter to leave any one out."

put it in to-day."

I understood now why it was that Cousin Susan was so powerfully affected by the death of a great-uncle whom she had never seen till yesterday; she thought, if she had not left out that window sash, the murderer could not have gained entrance.

Aunt Samyra employed the finest detectives to clear up the mystery, but it remained a mystery still.

"Alicia," said my aunt, about six months after the murder, "what is your theory on this subject?"

"I have none," I answered, "unless it was a case of suicide."

"Impossible!" she ejaculated.

"What sort of mood was he in when he bade you good night?"

"Very bright and cheerful."

"How long was it after he left you before you retired?"

"I hadn't retired at all, but was putting up my hair in curl-papers, when I heard the pistol shot and went after you."

"Then you heard the report of the pistol shortly after he bade you good night?"

"I did."

"And you say he was in a bright, cheerful frame of mind?"

"Yes; he went off with a laugh about being in the top story, saying he could get a better view of the comet than any of us, as he would be so much nearer to it."

At the end of this conversation I was as much in the dark as I had been at the beginning.

But one thing had been borne in upon my mind very forcibly of late, and that was the change in Susan Ellen. Ever since that memorable night she had been a different girl, and seemed only the shadow of her former self.

I attributed this state of things to a morbid, oversensitive conscience, which would persist in attaching great blame to herself for having left out that window sash. One phase of her character, however, I was at a loss to account for, and that was the sudden and unaccountable aversion she had taken to Aunt Samyra's poor old yellow cat.

Formerly, I remembered, she had been the cat's greatest champion, and many a time she had shared a meal with pussy; but now she actually shivered if the animal happened to brush against her.

But it was many years before I discovered the cause of that aversion. Aunt Samyra was dead; pussy had died and been buried by me with many tears un-



"NOW, GIRLS, FOLLOW ME."

der the cypress tree in the back yard; Susan Ellen had married Mr. Wentworth, the young man who had been her escort to the concert, the night of Uncle Ralph's death; the old home had been broken up, and I was drifting about the world in an aimless way.

Susan Ellen had invited me to spend a week with her, and as her husband was away on business we had ample opportunity for the exchange of long confidences about old times.

One night, as we sat by the fire, the subject happened to turn on Aunt Samyra's old yellow cat; I asked her why it was that she took such a sudden and unaccountable aversion to that poor animal?

"It is something I have often wanted to tell you," she answered, "but somehow always shrank from doing so. At first I was afraid, and afterward I just kept putting it off because I knew I ought to have told it at first. You remember the night Uncle Ralph was killed?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, that evening I went to a concert with Mr. Wentworth. We got home about 10:30 and stood talking at the front gate a few minutes, he meaning while calling my attention to the comet, which was then the universal topic of conversation. I felt guilty standing at the gate, for Aunt Samyra had often told me not to do so, and involuntarily I glanced toward the house, expecting to see her poking her head out of the window, looking at me. Instead, two curious objects in Uncle Ralph's window caught my eye.

"You remember it was such a bright moonlight that one could see very distinctly; you remember, also, about my washing the windows. The bottom sash was in, but hoisted on a piece of broom handle so as to take the place of the top sash, leaving the bottom of the window open.

"Now then, on the window sill, walking backwards and forwards, looking at the comet, too, I suppose, was Aunt Samyra's old yellow cat, while Uncle Ralph, with his head poking out from the window, was also regarding the comet with great interest."

"The first feeling was one of surprise."

any; he was looking at the comet now, to be sure, but if he were to glance in my direction, and then to tell Aunt Samyra!

"While I hesitated what to do, pussy began rubbing herself against the piece of broom handle that held up the window. The broom handle, I am afraid, had been put up in a very slanting, insecure fashion; I realized this in a flash as I noticed Uncle Ralph's pistol lying on the window sill. And I had barely realized it when the broom handle slipped, the window came down on the pistol, and you heard the shot, and know the rest."

She paused and took a deep breath.

"And now I want to know which was responsible for the murder, the cat or the comet?"—Criterion.

The Mother-in-Law.

Many a man owes his success to the good management of his mother-in-law. —Chicago Daily News.

DOWN EAST.

The Old Folks at Home in New England.

The dwellers in New England's little villages and on its scattered farms, if they are young and energetic, seldom love their native region, or have any ambition to stay where fate has placed them. Instead, they turn long eyes cityward and seek excuse and opportunity to shift their habitation to centers of trade and hurrying life. But once let the desire to go be gratified, and the past takes on a bright hue, and the affection for the earlier surroundings instantly grows. The work and the pleasures of those receding farm days are in the retrospect very sweet. The skies were always bright then, the days care free, and the particular district that was home seems to an unusual degree blessed and delightful.

But to very many of the young and middle aged of our cities the thing that binds them closest to the New England country is the fact that it is still the home of the old folk. New England's rugged hills and alluvial valley have been a nursing ground for pioneering and for city enterprise from the earliest days of its history. It is doubtful if this is true to any like degree of any other part of the republic. There is something in the air, or soil, or mental environment that makes the nestlings, as soon as they get their growth, want to try their wings. One by one they leave, but the old folks, as a rule, stay behind.

That the old people should stay is often a necessity, yet it is apt to be choice, besides. A sapling can be transplanted and takes kindly to new soil; but the full-grown tree has wide-reaching roots and is almost a part of the spot where it stands. The feelings of the old people are interwoven with the life of the community of which they are a part, their habits are established, their old friends are about them, and their home and the daily routine of their farm work fit them as a glove does the hand. To try to accustom themselves to a different life would severely rack their sensibilities. Just the moving into another house would be something of an ordeal, even if it were in the same neighborhood, and even if it were decidedly better than the one left. Inconvenience and hardship are minor evils after you once get inured to them. So the western daughter and the city son beg the aging father and mother to share their homes in vain. The old folks grow gray and infirm, and still they linger in the bleak New England farmhouse through biting winters and sultry summers till the end comes.—Clifton Johnson, in Frank Leslie's.

Clay's Granddaughter.

Richmond, Ky., February 20.—The engagement is announced of Miss Mary Bennett, of this city, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Bennett and granddaughter of General Cassius M. Clay, the "Sage of Whitehall," and Paul Collins, of Fairhaven, Wash. The wedding will take place at the palatial home of the bride, in this city, March 7, and Mr. and Mrs. Collins will leave at once for their Western home.

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SOLD BY HER FATHER.

Three Times Chief Corndropper Has Disposed of His Daughter to Willing Bidders.

Mary Corndropper has been sold by auction for a third time. Her father, former Chief Corndropper, of the Osage tribe, stole a march on his watchers and the sale was made before any outsider could learn what was going forward. The price paid for Miss Corndropper was 300 ponies.

Miss Corndropper is an Osage half-breed Indian girl of great beauty, who was educated at the government school at Powhuska, I. T. She is only 22 years



MARY CORNDROPPER.
(Sold into Marriage Three Times by Her Greedy Father.)

old, but she has been married twice before now, and each time she was sold by her father to the highest bidder among the full-blooded bucks of the tribe. Mary ran away from her two former husbands and returned to her father, only to be sold from the block for the third time.

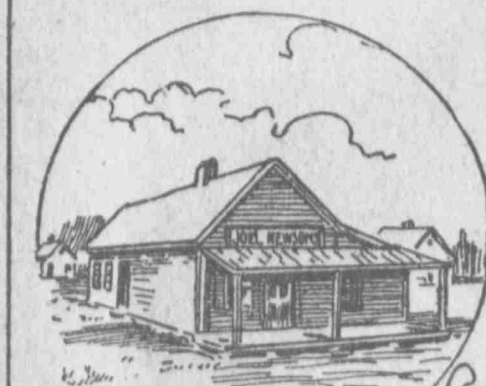
Ex-Chief Corndropper is one of the richest of the Osage Indians. He has a ranch of 2,800 acres of fertile land, all well stocked, and his home is one of the finest in the reservation. His daughter is the princess of the tribe. She was first sold into marriage at the age of 17 to Tall Chief for 400 ponies. Her mother caused a separation after one year of wedded life. Tall Chief and his mother-in-law could not live under the same roof. An Indian mother-in-law, he says, is just as big a nuisance as a pale-face mother-in-law. Not many months later she was again sold to John Logan, a prominent member of the Osage council in 1898. He lived with her at the home of her parents until six months ago, when he left on account of the domineering mother-in-law. The young wife, who had become a mother a few months before, was heartbroken. She loved John and insisted that he loved her. For a number of days she refused to eat and for a long time she mourned his departure. She suffered a severe sick spell as a result. Her child is a boy.

—Wichita (Kan.) Letter.

OLDEST POSTMASTER.

In Point of Service Uncle Joel Newsom, of Azalia, Ind., Is Without a Rival.

Down at the village of Azalia, Ind., lives an old man, popularly known as Uncle Joel Newsom, who proudly claims the record as the oldest postmaster in the country in point of service. He first took charge of the Azalia office back in 1859, afterwards receiving his commission from Postmaster General Blair. Since 1859 he has been distributing the mail without a break. Once, when Cleveland was elected president the first time, an attempt was made to oust him, but it failed miserably, and since then no one has even ventured to dispute his



AZALIA POST OFFICE.
(Its Affairs Have Been Administered by Joel Newsom Since 1859.)

right to the office. It is generally considered that the only power which will ever succeed in dispossessing Joel is the old gentleman with the scythe and hourglass. Not once during the 41 years of his occupancy has any correction been made in his accounts with the department, and he is extremely popular with all the people of Azalia. When Joel first became entitled to write P. M. after his name only one mail a week came to Azalia. Now that enterprising village proudly boasts two mails a day. When he started to stamp letters it cost five cents to mail each letter, while the postage on weekly papers was 20 cents a year. Soldiers' letters could be franked, but were charged for at their destination.

The most exciting event in Mr. Newsom's career as postmaster occurred in 1865, when Frank Reno, a noted Indiana bandit of the old days, cracked the post office safe and disappeared with \$8,000 in government bonds. The bonds were afterwards recovered, and Frank was hanged by a mob at New Albany, Ind., so "Uncle" Joel came out of that affair without loss.

Mr. Newsom is a republican, but he is a postmaster for life, and he says "pardon my politics."

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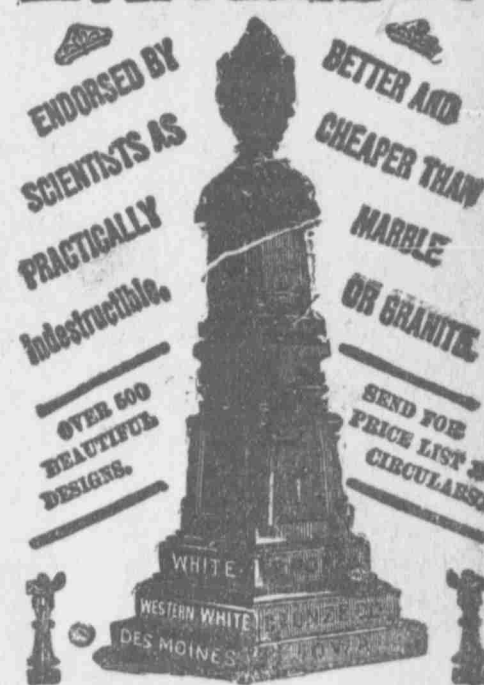
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